

Judas Contract

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1. Part 1

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It was late February in Salem. The wind had an icy chill to it, freezing any uncovered skin it could find. The sun desperately tried to shine beneath a gray cloud-covered sky. February was always a somewhat miserable month in Salem. The Brady's tried to warm not only their hands, but also their hearts inside the pub. Caroline smiled that everlasting optimistic smile she always did, while Shawn fixed up some hot chocolate. Bo and Hope sat in silence at a table; Hope's slender fingers absentmindedly wrapped themselves around the half empty mug on the table. Bo drummed his fingers, the other hand holding the weight of his head with his elbow resting on the table. An occasional mutter about the weather was heard every now and then, but other than that, nothing. For one of the first times in Salem history, there were no rumors, no one targeted for death, no pretend weddings, nothing. For the first time in Salem history, people were actually bored.

"I'm bored." Shawn D. announced to the world. His dad glanced in his direction and gave a half-hearted nod.

"No, I'm really bored. Can I go home now?"

His father gave him a sharp look, one of his famous 'don't-give-me-no-attitude-boy' looks. Hope gave him a sympathetic one instead. "Honey, we told Gran that we would escort her home. She just has to finish up her crib game with Maggie."

Shawn said a few words concerning his feelings towards crib under his breath. He continued to sit patiently with his hands folded in his lap, staring at them as though they were the most fascinating things on this earth. And at the time, they probably were.

Meanwhile, Hope's thoughts were pretty much the same as Shawn's. How much longer could one crib game take? She shook her head though, realizing that she should be grateful just to see her Gran again. Mind you, she wasn't really seeing her, more or less she was just sitting in the pub bored out of her tree listening to the wind swishing outside the window.

"Good one Mrs. H! But how's about one more game?"

The Brady family groaned all at once.

Sami stared at her breakfast in disgust. She hated scrambled eggs. Kate knew that. She knew Kate knew that. That's what made her hate the woman even more. This whole family was out to get her. And it all began with scrambled eggs. She played with it, pushing the eggs with her fork, back and forth on the plate, hoping that somehow, they might just magically disappear.

Her actions did not go unnoticed. Austin kept giving her odd looks, while Kate merely smirked in her direction. "What's the matter Sami? Lose your appetite?" She taunted.

Sami glared at her. "As a matter of fact, I have."

Victor sighed and let out a low growl. "Will there ever be one morning that I don't have to listen to this constant bickering between you two? Kate, it would be a nice change; I'm not particularly crazy about mangled eggs myself. Sami, if you don't like what's being served around here, I suggest you start playing up your usefulness and make it yourself."

Both women turned their heads in defeat. Sami rose up from the table and stormed away. Austin gave his mother a stern look and followed after her. That left Victor and Vivian alone.

"I'm sorry to have upset you darling, that wasn't my intention."

Victor stared at his beautiful wife, thinking his words over carefully. "I know that Kate, but what exactly was your intention? I intend on raising a family in this house, and I can't do it unless you cooperate with me. Understood?"

Kate solemnly nodded her head.

"Sami, wait up." Austin hurried to catch up with her.

She turned around suddenly, with a look that could wilt any flower. "Austin, I know what you're going to say so don't even start. I just can't stand this constant pressure on me, and if you expect me to put up with thatâ€¦."

Austin grabbed her by the shoulders, placing a hand over her mouth. "Shut up. What I was going to say was, did you want to go out for breakfast?"

Sami laughed lightly, her head shaking side to side. "Of course. Let's get out of here."

Bo attempted to stifle a yawn but with unsuccessful results. Shawn did the same. Bo looked up, noticing the unsightly bags that were beginning to form under Hope's eyes. He perked up, clapping his hands together to break the silence.

"Okay, I have an idea. Hope, why don't you take Shawn home. You look pretty tired, and I'm sure that Shawn has some homework do."

Shawn averted his eyes, knowing full well that he didn't even bring his books home with him, but nodded in agreement anyway.

Hope weighed her options, which weren't many, deciding that Bo's ideas were much better than hers. "What about Gran?"

"Don't you worry your pretty little head about Mrs. H. I'll take her home. I'll just explain that Shawn was getting pretty tired and you decided to take him home. I'm sure that she'll understand. She always does."

Hope flashed Bo her million dollar smile as she turned to kiss him. "You're so smart."

Bo kissed her back, enveloping her in a huge hug. "I know, that's what makes me so irresistible."

Hope gave him a final kiss goodbye and headed for the door with Shawn taking the lead.

What happened next would scar their memories for years to come.

The windows began to shatter systematically, starting from the right to the left. Gunshots rang out like thunder, splintering the wood, piercing the walls. Tiny shards of glass flew through the air, becoming tiny missiles as they lodged themselves in whatever solid material they could find.

Bo let out a cry of warning that could barely be heard over the constant barrage of gunfire. Hope grabbed Shawn by the jacket, hauling him down to the floor, covering her son's head in her arms. Maggie and Gran slid under their table, burying their heads in their hands. Caroline screamed as she ran for cover behind the bar.

Shawn was in the kitchen when the panic began. As he walked out into the open, a searing pain lit up in his right arm. He grimaced, falling to the ground, dimly hearing his wife's scream for him. He looked at his upper arm, seeing the bright red blood that methodically ran down his arm, dripping from his fingertips. He was suddenly aware of everything that was taking place around him. He could feel Caroline's hot tears falling onto his cheek. He heard Bo's yelling, knowing that it was meant for him. He nodded in his son's direction, attempting to assure him that he was all right.

Shawn D's body jerked every so often as tiny pieces of glass pelted his skin. He couldn't remember a more chaotic time than this. His mother's breath was becoming quicker with every shot, fearing that the next one could be their last.

And then it stopped.

It stopped so suddenly, as though it never even started. Cautiously,

everyone started to raise his or her heads. Bo swung his head around frantically; searching for members of his family that might have been in firing range. He spotted his mother tending to his father. He had been shot, there was no doubt about that, but it didn't look to be life threatening. Mrs. H. and Maggie were still underneath the table. Mrs. Horton's eyes were wide with fear, while sobs racked Maggie's body.

He called out for Hope, who answered back shakily. He spotted them crouched very close to the door. Hope still held Shawn D's head in her arms.

He was about to crawl over to them, when an object came flying through the window. A cylindrical metal can fell to the floor, and slowly began emitting a greenish gas into the air. Bo knew what it was instantly.

"Cover your eyes â€" it's tear gas!"

Shawn D wanted to see what was happening, but the action would make him pay dearly. His eyes immediately began to water and sting with irritation. A cough racked his body, and once he let it out, he couldn't stop coughing.

Hope squeezed her eyes shut, and tried not to breathe as heavily. She grabbed Shawn's head again; trying to shelter it from the gas, unaware that he had already felt the effects of it. "Keep your eyes closed Shawn."

Shawn was unable to answer her, cough after cough choked his airway.

Bo could no longer see the interior part of the bar. He had to get his family out of there, but how? He couldn't even see them anymore. Who the hell was doing this?

The door burst open, nearly falling off its hinges. Men in suits with gas masks on strode into the bar and calmly surveyed the scene. They scanned the inhabitants one by one, when their eyes came to rest on the two they wanted.

Shawn D felt the front of his leather jacket being hoisted up roughly. He grabbed the arms of someone he suddenly realized he didn't know. He forced his eyes to open, to look at this person who might kill him in the next two seconds. What stared back at him created a shiver deep in his spine. The man was at least an entire foot taller than he was, with a very expensive-looking suit on. A gas mask covered his face, making it impossible to recall any facial features. He looked like something out of a secret service. The man shoved him through the door, into the waiting arms of another man almost identical to him.

Hope had felt her son being ripped out of her arms and she panicked. Her maternal instincts told her to fight with everything she had to get him back. But the gas filtering about her made it impossible to see who had taken Shawn D. As she flailed hopelessly in the gas, two strong arms came down on hers and caught her in a merciless grip. She struggled against them but it proved to be futile. They had her. She kicked and waved her arms madly, but to no avail.

Shawn's kidnapper held his arms behind him. His back was hunched over as his coughing overtook him, at times making him feel like he was about to vomit. But there was no way in hell they were going to take him without a fight. He kicked whoever was behind him, hearing a loud grunt as he connected with a shin. For a moment, his attacker let go of his arms. But a moment was all he needed. He ran blindly; his eyes clouded over with water.

Unfortunately, he didn't get very far.

A fist was there to meet him as he tried to escape. Shawn staggered back, putting a hand to his nose. He felt hot blood gush into his hand, and the throbbing pain that soon followed. Too stunned by the attack, he put up no fight when his kidnapper grabbed his hands and roughly tied them together behind his back. A gag was placed in his mouth, making it impossible to let out his coughs properly.

Hope had already been restrained, although it took two men to do it. Even while tied up, she still kicked out at her attackers. She could see Shawn D now. Two men escorted him on either arm. His head hung low, and he seemed to be having trouble walking. She tried to yell his name, but the gag made it muffled. Shawn heard her though, and lifted his head slightly. It was then that she saw the blood running down his face. Her eyes widened at the sight, and she tried to run towards him. The men had a good grip on her and every time she attempted to move, that grip got stronger.

Shawn felt light-headed. He knew his nose was broken, his eyes wouldn't stop stinging, and his lungs were beginning to ache.

"Put her in the back." A low voice commanded.

"What about him?"

"Put him in the trunk." And that was the last phrase that Shawn D heard for a very long time.

Sami and Austin arrived back from their Macdonald's breakfast in fine moods. They were joking freely with each other about Will, about scrambled eggs, about anything that could make the other one smile. Austin held the door open for Sami who was still laughing at Austin's corny joke, but her smile soon faded when she saw who was waiting for her inside. Sami silently swore to herself. Austin's smile crept away at the sight too. "Here we go again." He sighed to himself.

Nicole sat on the coach, looking luxurious as always, sipping a glass of champagne. "Well, well, well. Look who it is! It's Austin and his wench!"

Sami's face turned beet red, her entire body shaking as she tried to contain her anger. "Why youâ€¦!"

Austin held up his hand. "Enough Sami. Don't let her get to you." Austin glowered at Nicole, saying his words loud enough so she would be able to hear them. "Don't sink to her level."

"So what are you now Austin? Sami's little conscience? Cuz we all know she could use one."

Sami smirked at Nicole. "Like you should be one to talk. Hey, isn't

it a little bit early in the day to be drinking? Or are we on the reverse 12 step program?"

Nicole threw her head back, laughing as though that were the funniest thing she had heard in a long time. "Ah Sami, always good for a laugh. At least you're good for something. Right Austin? Or maybe she really doesn't cut up to the rest."

"Just what do you mean by that Nicole?" Sami asked.

Austin glared at Nicole while Nicole smiled back and raised her champagne glass in a toast to him.

Marlena and Belle walked together, arm in arm, just like they used to when Belle was a little girl. Marlena couldn't believe how much her little girl had grown. She was beginning to look like a young woman more and more every day. Her opinions and values were starting to take shape, she was thinking for herself now. Marlena knew that that would mean taking responsibility as well. There were so many things for a mother to worry about these days, and she dreaded the thought of all the tough choices that Belle would have to make on her own, but she trusted that Belle's instincts and morals were in the right place. Most of the time anyway.

Belle suddenly gasped. "Ohmigod mom, look!" Belle pointed to the Brady's pub, with it's windows all smashed and the door lying on the ground. Marlena grabbed her daughter's shoulder, stopping her from entering the pub.

"Don't go in there honey, it's dangerous. Go call the police."

Belle ran off while Marlena crept up to the nearest window. Carefully, she peered inside. The floor was littered with glass, the tables were strewn across the floor, and the walls had giant holes in them, caused by the bullets. She heard movement inside, and she ducked underneath the window.

Bo was helping his father to his feet. The look on Shawn's face was one of pure shock. This was his place of business, this was family, and the thought that anyone could be so heartless as to rip it all apart from him, was more than one man should have to take. Caroline was frantically calling the police, tears streaming down her face the whole time. A thought struck Bo as he looked about. Where were Hope and Shawn D?

He called their names over and over again. A sudden movement from outside got his hopes up. A woman in a black coat. He called Hope's name again, but a different voice called back.

Marlena ran into the pub. Bo's eyes were clouded over with fear as he held Shawn up. "Bo, what happened? Who did this?"

Bo continually shook his head. "I don't know. Was Hope or Shawn D out there?"

Marlena shook her head with an imploring look in her eyes.

Bo let out a small cry of helplessness. "Dear God, I think they've been taken."

"What's the matter Austin? You look a little bit worried." Nicole was a pro at taunting other people.

Austin struggled to remain unemotional, despite Nicole's constant viscous attacks. "You're drunk Nicole. For God's sake get some help."

Nicole attempted to stifle a laugh. "Who's going to help me, you? Oh give me a break Austin. This whole, 'I'm out to save the world routine, because that's the kind of goody-two-shoe I am' is starting to get annoying. I'd say if you were going to start improving on anything, it might be your love life. You seem to have done a fine job of screwing that up."

Sami lost it. "You no-good, two-timing, heartless bitch! Austin did everything he could to keep his marriage together! It was Carrie's choice to leave him."

"How fortunate for you Sami. With Carrie out of the way, you could just move right in. Kind of makes you think, doesn't it Austin? Anyway, I'm glad that Carrie had the guts to finally pick a winner."

Austin glared at Nicole. "Just what is that supposed to mean?"

Nicole's eyes rolled. "Oh, I don't know. That fact that her husband ran away with her worst enemy might put a damper on any relationship."

Sami pointed at Nicole. "Hey, he was saving my life."

Nicole eyed Austin, who turned his head away. "At what cost? Your marriage? So I guess there's only one question to ask then. Was it worth it?"

Sami turned to face Austin, who still had his back to both women. Nicole smiled.

"Well, was it Austin?"

The police headquarters were buzzing with life. Detectives ran around the offices with files in their hands, talking on their cell phones, all in the hopes of retrieving some sort of information on the shooting and kidnapping. Bo sat quietly in Abe's office, his fist covering his mouth. His eyes were wide with fear.

Roman stood guard over his little brother, feeling the helplessness that emanated from Bo. He gently massaged Bo's shoulder. "Don't you worry Bo, we're going to get them back. I promise you that."

Abe and John stormed into the office, slamming the door on the chaos outside. Stress contorted Abe's face in a way that made him look years older. They argued over motives and theories.

"Abe, your answer is right in front of you. Stefano has got to be behind this." John argued.

Bo shook his head. "This isn't Stefano's style. For once in my life, I think he's innocent."

John's eyebrow went up in amazement. "Do you have any idea then?"

Bo's head hung low. "I don't know. There hasn't been any indication of who did this or why this happened. There hasn't been any strange activity at all."

"Maybe it wasn't meant to be your family." Roman suggested.

"No." Bo replied. "This was too systematic. They knew what they were going for."

"Ransom maybe?" John asked.

"I highly doubt that they would come after my family if they were looking for money. That would be more your area John."

"Well, that leaves one probable answer." Abe stared at Bo grimly. "Revenge."

Hope was thrown roughly into a cell. Her gag was removed, as were the bonds that held her. She glared at her attackers as they walked away. A small shiver shook her body. The cell she was in was damp, with a nasty chill to it. The cell was somewhat large; perhaps three times the size of a normal jail cell. There was only one solid wall; the rest of the sides were bars. A bunk bed was in front of the cement wall, a particularly big bunk bed. There was one small wooden table beside the bunks. On it there was a jug of water. Hope went to the bed and wrapped one of the blankets around her. She walked to the bars, and wrapped her hands over them. God, how she hated being trapped. It seemed like she just escaped from her last prison, and now here she was again.

"Hey! Is anyone there? I want to see my son! Please, let me see my son! Is anyone out there? Can you hear me?" Hope wailed at the top of her lungs.

Suddenly, there was movement at the end of the hall. She could hear heavy footsteps, a pair of them, coming toward her. It was nearly impossible to see in this all enveloping darkness.

The cell opened, and a body was shoved in. She could hear him grunt. She knew that sound. She rushed over to see the person and found it was exactly who she wanted it to be.

Shawn still had the gag on his mouth and his hands were still tied behind his back. Hope frantically ripped the gag off of him, trying to get him to talk.

"Shawn, are you okay? Please talk to me."

Shawn groggily looked up at his mother. Blood covered the gag and the lower part of his face. Hope could see yellow circles forming under his eyes, a good indication of a bad nasal break. She hugged her son tightly, and began to take the ropes off his wrists.

"Where are we?" Shawn looked around at the cell while Hope took the last of the ropes off.

"I don't know. We were in that car for a long time, I know that. Did they say anything to you?" She helped him to his feet.

"No. I got a nice ride in a trunk though."

Hope looked like she was going to cry. "Oh honey." She hugged him close as the tears started to gently fall down her face.

Kate rubbed her eyes for the tenth time in the last hour. None of her work was going to get done today. Her life was beginning to take a downward spiral; her husband became more and more distant everyday, her youngest son was beginning to grow up, her oldest son was with that bitch Sami, and her other son had that wonderful tramp Nicole hanging off his arm. No thanks to herself. As the stress began to form itself into a pounding headache, she sighed. She could only wonder whom Phillip would end up with.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. Kate rolled her eyes and wondered which moron it was this time. "Come in!" she yelled.

As the door opened, she rubbed her eyes again. "What?" she commanded.

"It's good to see you too Kate."

Kate looked up into the dark eyes of Nicholas Alamain.

"Mom?"

Marlena swung around in her seat to face Belle. "Yes honey?"

Belle came and sat beside her mother at the breakfast table. "Have you heard anything?"

Marlena stroked her daughter's hair, trying to smile reassuringly. "We haven't heard anything yet honey. The kidnappers' haven't made any demands so far."

Belle's face clouded over with concern. Marlena knew that her daughter had very strong feelings for Shawn D. She could only massage her shoulders in an attempt to comfort her. "They'll find them Belle."

Belle looked up at her mother. "But what if they don't?"

The night was beginning to take its toll on Bo Brady. He could feel exhaustion tugging at his brain. He hadn't eaten in the last twelve hours, nor had he even gone home. He sat planted in the same chair at the station that he'd been in for hours. John took a seat beside him, staring at his friend with concern written all over his face.

"You should go home Bo. You need some rest. You know we'd call you if anything came up."

Bo shook his head. "I can't leave. Not until we know something. That's my family out there John, I want to be there for them."

John nodded. "I know what you mean. Shout if you need something."

Bo gratefully nodded his head. He chewed on his nails a bit more, pondering what could possibly be happening to them right now.

Hope grasped the bars of her cell in reservation. How would Bo ever find them? She didn't even know where they were. She didn't even know who had them, or why they were here. What the future had in store for them at this point was anybody's guess. She turned to face her son, who was sound asleep on the bottom bed. It had been an especially tough day on him, and she welcomed the thought of sleep coming quickly to him. As for herself, she didn't think she'd be able to sleep for the next year. Or at least until they were rescued, whenever that would be.

Hope sighed, and sunk to the floor of the cell. A small shiver flew through her body. The floor was freezing. It reminded her of the castle. She violently shook her head, as if trying to shake the memories away. It was too painful to remember all the time she lost in there, all the time that should have been spent with her family.

And silently, Hope prayed.

Caroline was trying unsuccessfully to force Shawn into a wheelchair. "I tell you woman, I don't need the damn thing!"

"Darling, you've been shot. I don't think you should be standing!"

Shawn grunted. "I was shot in the arm, not in the legs. It doesn't mean that I can't walk. Lift weights, no. Walk, yes."

Caroline growled. There was no doubt that she had married the most stubborn man on this earth. "I'm not letting Bo deal with this pain alone. We should be helping him." Shawn reasoned.

Lexie could hear the Brady's arguing and decided to step in. "Shawn, Caroline is right. If it were my choice, and it is, I'd say that you have to stay in the hospital overnight for observation."

Shawn's mouth hung open, about to protest, when Lexie held up a hand for him to hush. "But I know that wouldn't work, not in a million years. So, you're free to go, but at least humor me, and take the 'damn thing' down to the lobby."

Shawn smiled brightly at Lexie. Boy he liked that kid.

Shawn Douglas slowly opened his eyes. A sudden thought caused him to leap out of bed and stare wildly about him. He groaned as he realized it all wasn't just a dream. He really was in this damn prison cell. He swore under his breath in frustration.

"I know. I feel the same way."

Shawn jumped slightly. He forgot his mom was here too. She sat in the same spot she'd been in last night; the blanket still wrapped tightly around her lithe shoulders. "What time is it?" he asked her.

She glanced at her watch. "It's just after eight. Isn't this pretty early for you?" she smiled at him.

Shawn attempted a half-hearted smile back. "At home, yes it would be. Here, I don't even know how I got to sleep so quickly. This isn't exactly the Plaza."

Hope nodded in agreement.

Just then, they heard a large door creak open. The huge iron door at the end of the corridor screeched in protest, as it was hauled open. Two guards strode down the hall, only this time, instead of suits they wore what appeared to be army uniforms.

Hope rushed to her feet and stood beside Shawn, both wondering what this could mean.

One guard stood directly in front of them, while the other opened the cell door. Hope realized this could only mean one thing; breakfast. She walked over to the cell door and took the tray of food from the guard, sizing him up the whole time.

Shawn stared at the guard, while the guard stared right back at him. The man was completely unemotional, but there was something very cold about him. Shawn knew that this was a very dangerous man, but he couldn't stop staring nonetheless. As the other guard closed the door and began to walk away, the guard and Shawn continued their staring war. Hope watched them in obvious concern, but dared not interfere for fear of turning it into something that it wasn't.

The guard came close to Shawn, inches from his face to whisper to him. "Get a good look boy," he smirked. "It could be your last." And with that he left. Shawn never let his eyes wander from the back of the receding man.

His mother placed a wary hand on his shoulder. "Shawn, what did he say?"

Shawn kept staring down the hall, and took what felt like his first breath in ages. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

Bo was two seconds away from falling asleep in his seat. The sound of the door slamming behind him woke him with a start.

Roman looked at Bo, who glanced back with bags under his eyes. He apologized for waking him, which Bo waved off. "Anything?"

Roman stared at his feet. "Nothing. I don't know Bo; none of this makes sense. These guys, whoever the hell they are, they're pros. They didn't leave any mark behind at all. There's got to be something that we're missing."

The wheels in Bo's head started turning at a profoundly fast rate. "Or maybe we just aren't dealing with the right people."

Roman stared questioningly at Bo. "What are you thinking little bro?"

Bo quickly got up out of his seat. "I have to go. Call me if you find anything." He left the station, leaving bewildered Roman.

Nicole walked around her office as though it were a catwalk. Everything about Nicole screamed confidence, from her cat eyes, to

the slinky camisole top she paired with leather pants. Not exactly an executive's wardrobe, but then again, when you saw what Kate wore sometimes, well Nicole was just keeping up the tradition.

She opened the door to her office, and was about to walk out when she saw Greta and Eric in the hall. She stopped just short of barging in on them, and opted to eavesdrop instead.

"I just think I need to find a stable job somewhere Eric. I mean, after all, I can't live off others for the rest of my life."

Eric grasped her by the shoulders, calmly looking into her brown eyes. "I understand that. But I also understand that this past year has taken its toll on you. Don't rush into anything too soon. You know that I'll support you in anything you do."

Great smiled gratefully at her boyfriend. "I know that. And I want to thank you for everything that you have done for me. It's more than what I could ask for."

Eric hugged her tenderly. "Believe me, you deserve every inch of it. I just had a brilliant idea."

Great looked up at him, smiling. "And what could that be?"

"Why don't you meet me here, after I'm done work, and I'll take you to a night on the town. Penthouse Grill sound okay to you?"

"That sounds fabulous."

Eric clapped his hands together. "Great! So it's settled. I'll miss you until then." He leaned over and kissed her lightly on the cheek. It was times like these that Greta thought her knees might give out on her.

As Eric walked away, Nicole's office door just happened to open up on Greta. Greta noticed Nicole and tried to hurry away.

"Greta!" Nicole exclaimed.

Greta rolled her eyes. When Nicole was excited to see you, you know it couldn't be good. Greta turned around and smiled her phoniest smile. "Yes, Nicole."

"Well, I couldn't help but overhearing that you were looking for a job."

Greta frowned. "You were eavesdropping?"

Nicole did her best to control her emotions. "No. I told you, I overheard. Anyway, I just heard about this perfect job."

Greta shook her head. "Oh, and what would that be? Selling my body on the streets of New York?"

Nicole chuckled. "Boy, you can be snide when you want to, can't you? But for your information, no, it's nothing like that. In fact, it's a terrific job. You'd be crazy to give it up. You see, there's this magazine publisher in L.A."

"Right Nicole." Greta interrupted. "You get me a job halfway across the country, and Eric is then yours to have?"

Nicole scowled. "This is not about Eric, this is about you getting on with your life."

Greta laughed. "Oh please Nicole. I'm not stupid. Anything that comes from your mouth can be automatically dismissed as trash." Greta turned on her heel and strode out of the hallway.

Behind her, Nicole fumed, swearing silently at Greta as she walked away. "I'll show you trash, honey."

Victor sat in his wheelchair, pondering some financial statements for Titan. Although he preferred to work at Titan, sometimes it was nicer to work at home with peace and comfort. At least when everyone else was gone.

"Sir, there is a visitor here to see you."

Victor looked up to see his butler standing before him. "Oh, who is that?"

"Mr. Bo Brady, sir."

Victor's eyebrows went up in question. Bo rarely ever came to see him, unless something was wrong. Victor waved at his butler, signaling him to let Bo enter.

Bo quickly walked into the room. Victor took notice of his exhausted appearance, and was about to comment on it when Bo spoke first.

"There was a shooting at the pub yesterday."

Victor's mouth hung open in shock. "That's terrible. Who would do such a thing? Was anyone hurt?"

"Pop got a shot to his arm, but he's okay. Hope and Shawn D were taken."

Victor took it all into thought. His grandson and daughter-in-law were missing; kidnapped. "Do you know who took them?"

There was a look of pure hopelessness written all over Bo's face. "No, I don't." The next few words would strike a chord in Victor's throat. "I need your help."

"What is it Nicholas?"

Nicholas smiled slightly at Kate. He knew she was stressed, when wasn't she? And because of that, he'd have to play his cards ever so carefully. Kate was an intelligent woman, she could usually see behind his innocent charm.

"I just came up to give you those figures you asked for."

Kate looked at him, scrutinizing his face. "No, I asked Sheila for those figures. Why couldn't she bring them up?"

Nicholas turned on his charm to the max. "Sheila had other things to do. Besides, I thought this might give us a good chance to talk."

Kate couldn't help but let out a small, mocking laugh. "Talk, yes, that's a fine thing to do."

Brandon grinned innocently. "I assure you, my intentions are pure."

"Well, you know what they say Nicholas, the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

Nicholas rested his hands on top of her desk. "But we wouldn't know anything about that, now would we?"

Hope and Shawn sat on the bed, eating their grilled cheese sandwiches and scrambled eggs. Of course it all tasted like cardboard, but when you're hungry, taste doesn't have much of an objective.

Hope studied Shawn's face as he ate. She reached up to gingerly touch his cheek, when he pulled back quickly.

"Still tender?"

Shawn nodded. The bridge of his nose had swollen up, and there was a small cut above it. The yellow under his eyes had now turned to a dull black. "Is your vision okay?" she asked. To this, Shawn nodded again.

Hope slapped her sandwich down on the tray and began rubbing her forehead. "We'll have to get you checked out when we get back."

Shawn looked hard at his mother. "When do you think that will be?"

Hope and Shawn looked at each other, knowing the despair that filled the air between them was emanating from one another. "Honestly?" Hope asked. Shawn nodded. "I don't know. I don't know much of anything anymore."

"Nicholas, has anyone told you that you are the most stubborn, persistent, young man on this earth?"

"Did they mention incredibly suave somewhere there too?"

Kate gave into laughing. She looked up into Nicholas's handsome face, eyes sparkling. "No, but they did mention charming."

Nicholas toned his attitude down to a more honest level. "I'm happy that I can make you laugh."

The seriousness abruptly returned to Kate's manner. "Nicholas, we can't do this anymore."

Nicholas nodded. "You're right. We can't. I'm tired of sneaking around all the time. I want the world to know that I, Nicholas Alamain, wants to share his life with you, Kate Roberts."

Kate was stunned. "What?! Nicholas, you haven't a clue as to what you're saying. This can't work!"

Nicholas walked to her behind the desk, kneeling in front of her on one knee. "Why not? Can Victor make you smile, or laugh? Does he even kiss you anymore? Is there anything between you two that could even pass for a loving marriage?"

Kate sighed.

"Look at you! He's resigned you to being a second-class woman. I would never do that to you Kate. Never. He's killing that wonderful spark that I love in you. And for some reason, you expect me just to stand by, and watch you slowly drift away. Well, I can't do that."

Nicholas took her hand in his. "I want you Kate. I want all of you, the good and the bad. I love you. Do you hear me? I love you."

Tears began to well up in her eyes.

"I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want to see you being treated the way you deserve to be treated."

"But Victorâ€¦".

Nicholas waved him off. "Victor has always provided for himself. I'm sure he won't mourn your loss for long. This isn't about competition anymore, Kate. You can leave it all behind. You can make a fresh new start"

Kate shook her head. "And run away?"

"Why not? Let me guess, because you've never lost a fight in your entire life. Well, I'm not asking you to lose. I'm asking you to just walk away. Let the barbarians fight their own wars. You've got a life to start living."

They stared at each other, longing in their eyes.

"I want to believe in what you say Nicholasâ€¦".

"Then do. Trust what's in your heart for once in your life. Do something for you, not for your career, or your family, or your financial needs. Just follow your heart."

"Nicholasâ€¦".

His face came closer to hers. His eyes felt as though they were staring right into the very essence of her soul. His mouth was closing in on hers.

"Will you come with me?"

Kate saw her life flashing before her. All the things she had done wrong in her life, all her schemes that played out into real life, all the men she wanted; and thought she loved.

"Yes."

"Bo, I know what you're asking. And you know that I would do anything for you."

"Then please, do this for me." Bo pleaded with him.

Victor looked about him with a grim look on his face. "Of course I will."

Bo hung his head. In all of the darkness he'd been living in, there seemed to be some glimmer of hope. He looked up at Victor with gratitude written all over his face. "Thank you."

Victor popped out his cell phone. "I'll have my men on it right away."

Night had approached Salem. Austin and Sami sat on the coach together, Sami cuddling Will in her arms. She stopped for a moment to glance at Austin, and saw the far off look in his eyes.

She signaled for the maid. "Maria, would you put Will in his bed?"

Sami kissed her son one more time, then handed him off to Maria.

"What is it, Austin?"

Austin seemed to snap awake at the sound of a direct question. "Hmm, what?"

Sami sighed. "You've been distant to me all day. What is it? Is it something Nicole said? It is, isn't it? That damn bit."

Austin hushed her. "Let's forget about Nicole for now. I just need some thinking room, that's all."

A hurt look crossed Sami's face. "Oh. Maybe I should just go to bed then."

Austin nodded. "Yeah. I think I'm going to hit the hay too."

Really not the answer she wanted to hear, Sami slowly got to her feet and passed one more dejected look on Austin before she left. Not even a kiss goodnight. Sami began to worry silently to herself.

Austin remained on the coach. Although he would never admit it to anyone, Nicole's words did get to him. What if he had been too hasty in his decision?

Memories were flashing before him. Of one of the first times he had met Carrie, when she was working in a clothing store. He could remember how red she had turned when he tried on that shirt right in front of her. He remembered the first time she cooked dinner for him. He remembered the adorable way she smiled, while keeping her eyes down low. He remembered the way she belted Sami at their wedding. He had to admit, that was a pretty good right hook.

Austin smiled to himself. Carrie had always brought a smile to his heart.

He remembered taking Sami and Will away from this town, for fear she would be sentenced to death. He remembered rescuing Carrie from a would-be rapist, and how later she begged him to stay with her. He remembered seeing her in Mike's arms, and felt his heart breaking. He remembered her signing the divorce papers in front of him, and felt his heart breaking even more when he didn't stop her. That was the closest he'd ever been to crying.

And even now, he could feel his eyes begin to water.

He remembered his and Sami's first kiss. He remembered saying goodbye to Carrie for the final time, when she left with Mike.

And now a tear did fall from his eye.

"God help me, I still love her."

Hope struggled to get comfortable in the top bunk bed. 'Another night in this damn place' she thought. Down below, it sounded as though Shawn was having just as much fun as she was.

"This sucks."

Hope chuckled. "I couldn't have said it better Shawn."

2. Part 2

> <meta name="Generator">

"Eric!"

Eric Brady stopped dead in his tracks at the sound of someone calling his name. He didn't entirely wish to face that it was, because he knew that voice. And he knew what she would want.

"Yes, Nicole?" He still had his back to her, not wanting to face her.

So instead, she walked around to face him. "I have an assignment for you. There's a shoot that I need you to photograph."

Eric huffed as he rolled his eyes. "And let me guess, you're the model?"

Nicole's smile beamed all over her face. "Well yeah. I am Bella's most bella." She chuckled at her joke. Eric didn't bat an eyelash. "Oh come on Eric. We've worked together tons. What's one more time going to matter?"

"Because I know you, Nicole." Eric's voice began to rise. "Because I know what you're capable of."

Nicole took a step back, frowning. "What, you don't trust me?"

Eric threw his hands in the air in disgust. "NO! I never will, Nicole, you hear me? You have no right anymore to talk to me like we're friends. I'll do the shoot, but if you try one little thingâ€¦"

"Hey, I'm a professional!" Nicole protested.

Eric laughed. "Oh yeah. You're a professional all right. Professional actress."

And with that, he stormed down the hall.

Nicole smirked to herself. "You just wait Eric. I have you right where I want you."

The ground shook violently. A sudden jerk nearly threw Hope from her bed above Shawn.

"What the hell?" Shawn muttered as he slowly rose out of bed.

"Is it an earthquake?" Hope wondered aloud.

The world seemed to sway forward for a moment, as anything not firmly fixed to the floor went tumbling towards the cell door. Shawn and Hope clung to the posts of the bed, when it suddenly stopped.

Both nervously rose to their feet, looking about them. "What was that?" Shawn asked.

Hope cautiously stepped towards the door. Thoughts began to pour into her head. A low rumbling that groaned beneath her feet confirmed her suspicions.

"Ohmigod. We're on a boat!"

A loud creaking noise averted their attention to the large iron door at the end of the corridor. In walked the familiar frames of the husky guards, escorting what appeared to be three new prisoners. Two men escorted the prisoners, just as they had with Shawn and Hope. Only these prisoners were chained, and they appeared to be stumbling as they walked. When they got closer, Hope could see that they were all men, and they were badly beaten. Hope stared wide-eyed at the spectacle, wondering what these men could possibly have done, what all of them could have done to deserve to be here? Not a word was spoken, not even pleas of bargaining. Hope could sense the dread emotion of the men as they came in. They seemed to be expecting their death at any moment.

The men were divided among three other cells, unchained, and left. Still the men did not speak.

"Are you okay?" Hope called as softly as she could, partly in fear of what the guards might do to her for speaking with them.

One man lifted his head ever so slightly to look at her, another lay on his bed, and the last sat on his bed casually, one leg pulled up to his chin, the other lazily drooping off the side of the bed.

The thought began to dawn on Hope that perhaps these men did not speak English. "Do you speak English?"

"Probably not." Came a voice down the hall. It belonged to that of the last prisoner brought in. The man looked to be in rough shape. He had dirty blonde hair, knotted in places as though it hadn't been washed in weeks. His face was caked with blood and dirt, and bruises

covered his cheeks and eyes. He was wearing a soiled white shirt, and leather pants that were tucked into knee-high tanned leather boots. He looked like something out of an Indiana Jones movie. The accent revealed him to be Australian.

But what of the other men? The two looked quite dark in features, perhaps South American. 'What an odd combination of people,' Hope thought.

"What's your name love?" The man asked.

"Hope. This is my son, Shawn." Shawn half waved to the man. "And you are?"

"Name's Jake. Jake Robertson. Now here's the obvious question, what's a pretty little thing like you doing in a place like this?"

Hope's face fell slightly. "To tell the truth, I'm not entirely sure. One minute we were having coffee, the next minute these thugs is kidnaping us and dragged into here. Could you please tell me, where 'here' is?"

Jake chuckled somewhat. "The ocean, love. My guess is we be heading for the Mediterranean. They'll take us to the prison in Malta. Once we get there, who knows what happens then? Folks say you never get out of that prison."

"Prison?" Hope was aghast. "But we've done nothing wrong, we were kidnappedâ€¦".

"Ma'am, hate to tell you this, but it doesn't matter how you got here. Cuz once they got you, there ain't a way in hell you're ever gonna get out."

"Susan, could you please check my messages?" Victor spoke through the intercom. He sat at his desk, pondering the latest newspaper. Still no clues; not from the police, or from his own men. He had an awful feeling about this, but would never dare to speak of it to Bo. His son was under enough stress already.

"Only one, sir. It's from your son, Philip. He wanted to know the whereabouts of his mother."

Victor's eyebrows furrowed. "His mother? Well did he try her office?"

"Apparently yes. But she left sometime this afternoon."

Victor thanked Susan for the information and sat quietly for a moment. Perhaps she had a headache or an appointment that he wasn't aware of. This was somewhat strange, but the marriage appeared to be hitting a rocky patch, and these days he wasn't sure where Kate went. She didn't come to him anymore.

Especially now. This was an unprecedented move on Kate's part. The knot in his stomach seemed to tense a little bit more.

"What's this for?" Hope asked the guard as he handed her a cotton gray workout suit another that was handed to Shawn D. The guard was silent as usual.

"You know you guys really don't make the best talkers in the world." She muttered to herself. She turned to face Shawn as he held the garments in front of him. "I guess they want us to work out." He shrugged.

Hope held the sweatshirt up against her chest. "Hope it's in my size."

Shawn rolled his eyes. "Momâ€¦."

"They're gonna let us see the sun 'fore they rid of us." Jake said from his cell.

Hope stopped dressing long enough to turn in Jake's direction. "Just who exactly is 'they'? You talk like you know everything about them."

"'They' are among the most powerful crime families in the world. You done them wrong, they's likely to do what they're doing now. Either that or they just shoot you."

"So why this long wait? Why don't they just get it over with?" Hope threw her hands in the air in desperation.

"Cuz you's obviously know something. Otherwise they wouldn't have bothered."

Hope grabbed the bars and shook her head. "But we don't. This is some terrible mistake, we don'tâ€¦"

A voice boomed from the end of the corridor. "Get your gear on. We're moving out in three minutes."

"Bo, how are you holding up? Is there anything we can do honey?" Julie placed her hand on his shoulder, trying to offer some sort of comfort.

Bo grasped her hand and looked up at her. Julie's face fell at the sight of his eyes. He looked as though he hadn't slept in a week. "I'm okay Julie. Well, you and Doug must be in about the same shape as I am."

"It feels that way Bo. It seems like I just got my little girl, and now I've lost her again."

Bo offered a grim smile in response. "I know how you feel."

"Um, Mr. Brady, has there been any word on Shawn and Hope?" Bo looked up into the wide eyes of Belle Black and Marlana. He shook his head silently. "I hope that they're all right."

Bo nodded. He took Belle's hand and grasped it tightly. He glanced around at all the people that were in the pub with him. All of his family and friends were there, anxious for some word on Hope and his son. Anxious for him to rescue them. He felt so frustrated, he might scream. But instead, he kept his emotions concealed and his head low.

"I want to thank you all for coming. But I should really get back to

the search. I don't want to miss a thing, you never know" | "

"Of course, son. You get back, and make sure ta call us, should anything arise." Shawn hugged Bo tightly as he got up to leave.

"I remember why I hate running." Shawn D panted as he ran beside his mother. They were in two rows of ten others, all wearing the same outfit, surrounded by guards. Hope was quick to notice that she was the only female.

There was a mean chill to the wind. The sun was completely obscured by the clouds, giving everything around it a gray texture and feeling. Hope did realize however, that the boat they were in, was a huge vessel, larger than any freighter she'd ever seen. It was now anchored to the bank of some sort of canal, or river. They definitely weren't in the Mediterranean. There were still large chunks of ice floating in the river. They had jogged up a path from the boat to a small pedestrian bridge above the river. But the biggest question of all was where the hell were they?

"Mom, where are we going?"

Hope glanced in his direction. "I don't know, just keep running."

Up ahead, one of the prisoners appeared to stumble. The whole lot of them quit running. Shawn and Hope glanced around them nervously. Hope squinted to see who it was, and stepped back quickly when she realized that it was Jake. The guards to the front stooped down to help him up.

And the world erupted before their eyes. Jake grabbed the nearest guard to him, slamming his knee into the guard's gut as he took his gun from his hands. The guard grunted as he went down in a heap on the bridge. Jake began firing wildly at anything that moved. Gunfire flew all around them as Hope and Shawn scrambled to get on the ground, covering their ears. The guards began firing back.

It was the perfect environment for an escape attempt. The prisoners started tackling guards left and right, running for their lives as they went. Some made it; most fell into a bloody heap on the ground.

The guard behind Shawn fired two shots, one that took Jake square in the chest. Jake covered the gaping wound in his sternum with his left hand, while his right hand frantically held the trigger down on his gun. He was going down, slowly, but still trying to kill as many guards as he could. More shots pelted his body, jerking him forward and back. The fire in his eyes was beginning to sizzle. It was more than Shawn could bear.

He kicked the guard behind him, as hard as he could. It took the guard by surprise, but hardly took him down. The guard grabbed Shawn from behind, roughly hoisting him up on his feet. Hope jumped on the guard, trying to get him to free her son. The threesome swung around, the guard squeezing onto Shawn as hard as he could, Hope punching the guard from behind, her little hands doing no damage whatsoever against his kevlar vest.

A blast shook the entire bridge and sent the three crashing into the railing. Shawn broke the wood railing and slipped through. Hope

screamed as she realized her son was dangling on the edge of the bridge. The guard had a firm grip on his arm, attempting to bring him back up. Another blast blew the guard off his feet and onto his stomach. Shawn screamed as the guard's grip slipped, and now was being held by his shirtsleeve. Hope grasped for her son, but he was too far from her reach.

"Shawn, hang on!"

Shawn's eyes were wide with fear. Hope screamed hysterically as Shawn slipped a little further. She realized then, that the seam at his shoulder was coming apart. It would only be moments now before he plummeted into the ice cold water, 15 meters below.

"Mom! I'm going to fall!" Shawn flung his right arm about, trying to find something to hang on to, but to no avail.

"Shawn please, hang on!" Hope begged, tears streaming from her eyes.

Shawn managed to call for his mother one more time, before the final thread came loose. He screamed as fell back first, into the waters beneath them. The guard sat up, holding onto the arm of the shirt.

Hope went into hysterics. A guard attempted to hold her as she screamed his name over and over. "For God's sake, someone go after him! He's still alive, PLEASE!"

At the water's edge, a small rescue boat was deployed to the search, with four armed guards inside.

On the bridge, Hope silently prayed.

The pain was immense. His back felt as though someone hit him with a two-by-four. Then the cold shock came. All muscles tensed up, and his breathing was reduced to frantic gasps for air. His head bobbed up and down in the water, but never allowed for a clear image of his surroundings. But he was moving, and fast. The current was strong, and he wasn't sure if he could fight himself from going under. He attempted to swim, trying to get to an edge. If he could, perhaps he would escape, find a rescue team for his mom. That is, if he survived. The thought dawned on him that this could his final glimpse of the world, and from it sparked a determination to live. He's survived worse than this. And besides, he was a moderately good swimmer. But the cold was another question altogether.

"What do you mean she's left town?!" Victor's question came out like a thundering roar.

"Well, ah, you see sir—" The butler stammered.

"Quit stalling and get to the damn point!"

"She left a message. She's resigned her position at Titan, and has decided to start anew with her life. She'll be back later to collect her things for good."

"The hell she will! I want you to tell me who she left with."

The butler looked around nervously. Victor took a step in closer. "I said, who?"

"Well, I believe, and I could be wrong about this, that it could have been Mr. Nicholas Alamain."

Victor's eyebrows raised questioningly. "You're going to tell me where they went." He demanded.

Night was coming quickly. Hope shivered in the cold. The rescue team had built up to three rescue teams. All were combing the river up and down, their flashlights scanning the water's surface. Hope huddled in her blanket. She adamantly refused to go inside the boat. So she stood at the water's edge, crying and praying for a miracle.

The captors were playing this out to their advantage. There was no need to place guards on her now. She wouldn't move an inch until some news on her son was revealed.

Shawn sputtered for air as he climbed the wall of mud that surrounded the river. He knew he had to hurry, he could hear the motors of the boats coming towards him. His back ached with a pain that limited his walking ability. He shivered uncontrollably, his whole body racked with spasms. He ran into the woods, occasionally tripping on the branches and fallen trees beneath his feet. He was well out of the boat's range now, but he had to find some sort of shelter. He was probably suffering from hypothermia already.

He walked for what felt like hours. His arms hugged his chest, trying to warm up his ice-cold hands. His walking was reduced to stumbling; his breathing became more and more labored. His hair was frozen at the ends, and his lips were turning a bluish color.

Every step became more difficult as his feet turned to frozen lead. His vision blurred periodically; he could feel sleep begging for him. But he kept pressing forward.

And then a light saved him. It was the heart-warming light of a fire. He leaned against a tree for support, as his legs felt like they might give out on him any second. He stumbled towards the cottage, feeling like he might pass out. He fell against the door, attempted to knock, but found that his arms were no longer listening to his brain. So he kicked it instead.

The door opened quickly, and he fell inside. Strong arms caught him, as he began falling for the floor. He looked up into the concerned eyes of a middle-aged man and woman. Blackness was taking over his vision, and he barely managed to utter a final statement before passing out.

"Help me."

The exotic beach was in actuality a basement room with spray painted linoleum. Eric didn't know who made these photo shoot sets, but he sure wished they would hire someone new, someone with at least an inkling of what a real beach looked like. He shook his head at the thought while adjusting the lens in his camera. 'And let me guess,' he thought, 'Nicole's going to come walking out in some skimpy g-string outfit.'

"Were you just thinking about me, Eric?"

Eric spun around to see Nicole in white terry cloth robe. 'Well, not quite a g-string' he thought.

"Where do you want me?"

Eric choked on his breath. "Pardon?"

Nicole looked at him oddly. "Where do you want me to stand? Geeze, what were you thinking?"

Eric shook his head. "Nothing. Stand over there." He pointed to a spot by a fake palm tree.

Seductively, Nicole slinked out of her robe to reveal a black push-up bra, and a tiny black bikini thong underneath. Eric was stunned momentarily, and then rolled his eyes.

"Yep, you sure are a professional."

Nicole looked over her body with a worried face. "What, is something wrong?"

Eric huffed. "Yes Nicole, this whole thing is wrong. You've done this before, and I'm not going to let you do it again."

"Eric, I'm not doing this for you. Please, don't flatter yourself. You see, it's all the other men in the world that want to see this." She gestured to her body.

"Really, and what about your husband?"

Nicole shrugged nonchalantly. "Believe me sweetheart, he gets off on it."

Eric laughed and muttered something that sounded like 'tramp' under his breath.

Nicole became enraged. Grabbing Eric by the shoulders, she swung him around and caught him with a mean slap to the cheek.

"How dare you call me a tramp!"

Eric rubbed his cheek reflexively. "Well you know what they say, if the shoe fitsâ€¦"

Nicole burst into tears. "You know at one time, Eric Brady, you felt something for me."

Eric stared at her in disbelief. "I believe that we've had this conversation before. The same one where you insist you left for the sake of my feelings. Well, you can cut the crap now Nicole. Because I don't give a damn."

Nicole looked up at him, eyes wide with a genuine fear. "You don't care for me at all?"

Eric shook his head. "Nope, can't say that I do."

She suddenly grinned. "Not one tiny, eensy, weensy, bit?"

Eric became confused. "I already said no."

And that's when the top came off. "Not even for this?"

Eric stared, and then realized he was staring, and quickly turned away. "Okay, I'm leaving."

"Not if I can help it." She grabbed him roughly, and kissed him passionately. To his amazement and disgust, he didn't hold back. "You were in love with me Eric. Feelings like that don't just disappear. You still are in love with me, I can sense that."

> Eric gasped for air. "You don't know what you're talking about. I'm in love withâ€|"<p>

She put her finger to his mouth. "Shhh. Don't even bring her into this. This is about you and I."

"Nicole, I can'tâ€|"

Nicole ripped his shirt open. "Oh yes you can." She giggled.

Hope lay in her bed, clutching Shawn D's jacket to her chest, hot tears streaming down her cheek, spilling onto the jacket. She cried his name over and over again, praying for a miracle.

"Anna, we don't know where he came from. He could be a convict of some kind."

Anna touched her husband's arm ever so lightly. "You saw the look in his eyes, Tom. I know when I see genuine fear. Something or someone is after him out there. If we tell anyone about him, we could be putting his life in danger. I won't have that young man's life on my hands."

"We should at least take him to a hospital, you can see he's got hypothermia."

Anna shook her head. "No, they'll look for him there. Why don't you call Dr. Brownoff? I'm sure he would make an exception for this house call."

Slowly, Tom nodded. He stared at the boy lying in the guest bed. He shivered uncontrollably, even under all the heated blankets they had placed on top of him. They changed his soaking wet clothes with new ones, although all Tom's clothes were too big for him. He hadn't opened his eyes since they brought him in, but the color was beginning to return to his face. Tom could only guess that that was a good sign. But if his wife was right, and there was something out there that was after him, then chances were, and it would come after them too.

There was no denying that Tom felt a chill run down his spine every time he looked at the boy, and what his presence in this house could bring down on them.

Victor sat silently in his desk. One hand rested against his mouth. His exterior was a perfect calm compared to his interior. He fought to control his rage. So, Kate and Nicholas ran off together on a

perfect vacation. What they definitely would not expect, would be his presence, right there with them. Victor was not the type of man to just give up. He much more preferred the revenge method.

He glanced at a picture of Kate and Victor, together, smiling, loving, and supposedly telling the truth to one another. He stood up slowly, still staring at the photograph. He threw it at the wall, and calmly watched the glass shatter into a million tiny pieces.

'No more lies.' He told himself.

The doctor listened quietly to the young man's heart. His temperature had risen, but was now rising on an extreme level. The throes of a fever had set in. But his heart rate appeared to be strong. Rapid, but strong.

He took off his stethoscope, and stared at the teen. His head shook back and forth, his mouth muttering nameless words. Beads of sweat rolled down his forehead.

Dr. Brownoff looked up at Tom and Anna. "Has he awoken at all?"

The couple shook their heads.

The doctor pondered this unusual case. "So, no ID, and he hasn't spoken at all?"

Anna glanced nervously at the doctor. "He just started getting a fever about an hour ago. He's said some things, but nothing that I could really make out. He did ask for our help when he first got here."

"I hate to tell you two this, because I know that you think you're acting on his best interests, but you must alert the police. He could be missing; he could be an escaped convict for all we know. But these types of cases must be reported. And if you won't, then I will."

Tom and Anna shared a look, both knowing what the other one was thinking. Slowly, Anna nodded her head.

"Dad!" Shawn cried out. He sat up suddenly in the bed.

The doctor grabbed him by the shoulders when Shawn tried to get out of the bed. He eased him back down into a laying position, but the boy continued to thrash in a feverish state. The doctor talked to him in as calm a manner as he could muster, and he seemed to relax somewhat.

The boy fixated his eyes on the doctor. "Where?"

"You're safe. I'm a doctor; I'm treating you for hypothermia. Can you tell me your name?"

Shawn looked puzzled. "Shawn. Is my mom here?"

The doctor glanced up at Anna who shrugged back. "No. We haven't seen her. Do you know what day it is?"

Shawn seemed to concentrate hard on the question, finally shaking his head. "No. Where are we?"

"You're close to Port Hastings."

"Huh?"

The doctor was beginning to look just as confused as Shawn was. "Nova Scotia."

Shawn bolted upright in bed again. "What?!?"

The doctor eased him back down again. "Where are you originally from?"

Shawn's eyes started to get heavy. He tried to fight the oncoming sleep, but could feel himself slipping as the seconds ticked by. "Salem."

The other inhabitants in the room all glanced at each other.

Shawn closed his eyes. "Could you please call my dad?"

"Sure." Anna came and sat on his bed, placing a hand on his heated forehead. "What's his name?"

"Bo." Shawn was slipping into unconsciousness. "Bo Brady."

Nicole had Eric stripped out of his shirt, as she was only in her bikini, and both were lying on the floor of the beach shoot. Eric came up for air, as Nicole grasped his biceps tightly.

"Don't stop Eric." She begged.

Eric pushed a piece of hair out of her eyes. "I have to Nicole, because there's something I want to give you."

Nicole smiled sweetly. "Why Eric, how kind of you. I can't wait to see it."

"Oh, it's not something you can see. It's something that must be felt. Close your eyes."

Nicole did as commanded, smiling from ear to ear as she did. "Don't make me wait too long, honey."

"By the way," Eric grabbed a glass of water that was resting on the table near by. "I'm not your honey." And with that, he dumped the contents of the glass on Nicole's near-naked body.

Nicole shrieked and jumped to her feet. "How dare you!"

"Oh, I dare."

Nicole glowered at Eric. "I swear, I will have your head!"

Eric rolled his eyes. "You know what Nicole? Don't bother. I quit."

Nicole's eyes widened. "You can't quit!"

Eric buttoned his shirt back up, and swung on his leather jacket as

he headed for the door. "Watch me. See you around Nicole."

Behind him, a wet, topless Nicole silently fumed.

The phone jolted Shawn Brady from his fitful sleep. He hadn't got much of it since the day that Hope and Shawn D were kidnapped. Muttering quietly to himself, he struggled to turn the table lamp on that lay above the phone. 'Who the hell calls this damn early in the morning?' he thought.

"Hallo? Yes, okay. YOU WHAT?" Shawn screamed into the phone. Caroline jumped up to a sitting position in bed. She tapped Shawn on the arm, hoping to get some response as to who was on the phone. He clutched her hand tightly in return. Caroline bit her lip as she realized it must be something about Hope and Shawn D.

Shawn looked like a pound of agony had been lifted off his chest. "Oh thank God. Look, tell me exactly where you are." Shawn scribbled furiously on a pad of paper. "Okay. Stay where you are, we're on our way."

Shawn hung up the phone quickly. Caroline had tears in her eyes as she looked at him imploringly. "Shawn's been found. He's in Nova Scotia. He's in bad shape they said." Caroline put a hand to her mouth in an attempt to stifle her gasps. "I've got to call Bo."

Bo and Roman jumped into the awaiting helicopter. Roman placed the headset on and turned to his brother. "How long ago was the call placed?"

"About two hours ago." Bo shouted.

"Did they give any word on Hope?"

Bo shook his head. "No. But chances are, if Shawn's escaped, Hope must be close by."

Roman knew his little brother's instincts were rarely wrong. He could only pray that they would get there in time.

Shawn's breathing was labored. He was barely conscious, slipping in and out constantly. One minute he'd be ice-cold, the next he'd be kicking the covers off. Anna placed cool, sopping wet cloths on his head, but nothing seemed to bring his fever down. "Dr. Brownoff, should we be taking him to the hospital?"

Dr. Brownoff frowned at his patient's distress. "I've placed a call in to the authorities; they should be here any minute. Did you call his family?"

Anna nodded, not once taking her eyes off Shawn.

"Good. I'm not sure if I want to move him just yet. I want to keep him here until the police are through. Any word on when the parents are supposed to get here?"

Tom shook his head. There was a rap at the door. Tom looked down the stairs. "I guess that would be the cops." He bounded down the steps towards the door.

When he opened the door, he barely had time to scream a warning. What appeared to be a SWAT team barged in the door, firing their guns and hitting Tom square in the chest.

Above, Anna shrieked in horror at the sounds of gunfire in her home. Dr. Brownoff quickly shut the door of the bedroom, locking it. He grabbed Anna and hauled her to the side of the bed, ducking below. Shawn woke up, terrified of the all-too-familiar sounds that were no doubt meant for him. Panting with the effort, he attempted to sit up in bed, but found it more difficult than he anticipated. He cried out in surprise as someone's hand suddenly grabbed his arm. Dr. Brownoff carried Shawn off the bed and down to the ground with him and Anna.

But they forgot about the window behind them. It burst open, and a man in black army gear swung through, dangling by a rope. He stared down on the three people lying before him. He hoisted Shawn up, holding his back to his chest. Shawn no longer had the strength to fight. Anna and the doctor held their hands up in the air, tears rolling down Anna's cheek, Dr. Brownoff visibly shaking.

Two shots and they were gone forever.

Shawn screamed, then passed out.

Hope awoke suddenly, jarred by the sound of the iron door creaking open. She jumped to her feet, grasping the cell bars, straining to see who was coming down the hall. She gasped as she realized that one of the guards was carrying a body in his arms. Hope could feel the hot sting of tears falling down her cheek as she prayed that he was okay.

One guard opened the cell door, while the other carried Shawn in, gently placing him on the bottom bunk. Hope could barely wait long enough to check on her son. As soon as he was lowered, she was there, stroking his forehead, and kissing his cheek. She could feel the heat rising from him, and knew he had a horrible fever.

"Thank God you're okay."

Shawn stirred slightly, and found himself staring into the eyes of his mom. "Mom?"

Hope nodded.

Shawn closed his eyes tightly, and for a moment, Hope thought he might be in some sort of pain. "They killed them."

Hope frowned. "Killed who?"

A single tear fell from Shawn's eye. "The people that were taking care of me. They shot them."

Hope hugged her son tightly, both crying quietly.

Bo, Roman and John stormed through the front entry way to the cabin, guns in front of them. Adrenaline pumping, they cautiously stepped into the house, eyes darting in all directions for any sign of a hostile.

"Bo," John tapped Bo lightly on the shoulder.

Bo spun around to John's direction. There lying on the floor was a man, mid-thirties, with a gaping hole in his sternum. Bo's eyes widened; he unconsciously switched off the safety on his gun. John was bent down inspecting the man; Roman was already headed for the stairs. Bo felt flutters in his stomach at the thought of what might else lay in this cabin.

"Bo!"

Roman's sudden yell made Bo jump. He glanced at John who was up on his feet and heading for the stairs.

Bo ran into the room where Roman was standing. Bo grimaced at the sight of two more bodies, one a woman, the other what appeared to be a doctor of some sort. The bed looked as though it had been slept in.

A cold chill sent shivers through Bo. He looked to the window, or where a window should have been. Glass littered the floor, all too reminiscent of his father's pub. Bo placed one hand on his forehead.

"We're too late." He lamented.

Greta fumbled with her keys, trying to balance the paper bag filled with groceries on one arm, and her purse and keys on the other. She momentarily lost her balance, tripping towards the door. To her fear, the door was open. Cautiously, Greta stepped through the threshold, clutching her groceries in front of her like it was her shield.

And suddenly, her face lit up. To her immense amusement, she found the apartment littered with tall taper candles and dark red rose petals. There was the soft hum of a violin on her stereo, and on the dinning table was a meticulously made dinner, waiting for her.

"Oh myâ€¦!" She sighed. She dropped the groceries off at the counter, set her purse down beside them, and took off her coat slowly, when someone began helping her. She turned her head to look into the eyes of Eric, helping her with her coat.

"Eric," she smiled up at him, "what's this all about?"

"This my dear," he tenderly stroked her chin, "is about you getting the love you deserve."

She shook her head. "But I don't deserve this."

Eric's face fell. "You're right."

Greta looked very confused, and a bit offended. That was definitely not the answer she was looking for.

Eric touched her cheek. "You deserve so much more."

He stooped down to one knee, taking her left hand in his. Greta caught her breath. Eric reached into his pocket, and came out with a tiny black box. "Greta, you've changed my life completely. I never thought that I could feel so devoted and enveloped all at once." He

opened the box to reveal a gold band with a diamond solitaire. Greta's eyes began to water. "Will you be my wife?"

Greta burst into tears. Too choked to say anything, she simply nodded. Eric jumped to his feet, threw his arms around her waist and kissed her for what felt like a million years. When they parted, Greta stared teary-eyed into his smiling face, and for the first time in her life, felt safe.

Eric glanced towards the table. "Um, I hope you don't mind."

Greta became concerned. "What is it Eric?"

Eric fidgeted. "Well you see, the first attempt at dinner didn't work out so good, so I had to order out from that little Italian diner down the street."

Greta laughed hysterically. "Well at least we already know who's going to do the cooking."

Hope stroked Shawn D's forehead. His fever was raging, perspiration making his hair wet, and his hands clammy. Hope struggled to remain calm, despite the hundreds of emotions that she felt. She wanted to cry, lament over this dilemma that they were in, and at the same time, her rage wanted to kill every guard she saw.

"Bo, please save us." She turned towards Shawn D. "Our son needs you."

The boat lurched forward. Hope's eyes widened with terror. They were preparing to leave again.

"Damn it Roman. We were so close."

Roman nodded. He could feel the frustration rising off of Bo. "I know bro. We'll get them back," he grasped Bo by the shoulder, "I promise you that."

They both glanced towards the house. The RCMP had the entire perimeter taped off as they were combing every inch for clues. John's helicopter sat in the clearing just down the road, having returned from its sweep.

A voice hollered his name in the distance. Bo and Roman spun around to face John, running up to them.

"The pilot and I saw a freighter of some kind, sitting in the straight. I think it's pulling out."

Roman and Bo shared a confused look. "What the hell would a freighter be doing out here?"

The three men exchanged hopeful faces. Bo nodded to himself. "She's there. I know it. Lets go!"

Nicole strolled into the living room, slugging down the last of her martini as she went. She stopped at the bar, eyeing the luscious looking liquor before her, thinking what her next choice should be.

"You know, we should start charging you for those drinks."

Nicole spun around and found Lucas sitting on the couch. "Oh, it's you."

Lucas stood up. "Not too happy to see me?" His tone conveyed a sense of disgust. Nicole eyed him warily. "What's the matter Nicole? Cat got your tongue? Or would that be Eric who got it?"

Nicole felt her blood chill. "What's your problem Lucas?"

Lucas strolled up to meet her eye for eye. "My problem is my wife running around like a whore behind my back!"

"What?"

Lucas grinned. "You heard what I said. How was your photo shoot?"

Nicole gasped. "How did, who told you?"

Lucas laughed. "Who told me? Why did I need to be told anything? I was the one who made sure that the set was just the way you wanted it. By the way Nicole, did you like the water that I left for you?"

Nicole blew up. "You set me up you little bastard!"

"That's not all I'm doing. You can say 'bye-bye' to all your little luxuries, because as of now, you're no longer an inhabitant of this house."

Nicole was flabbergasted. Lucas grabbed her by the arm and led her to the door. Holding it open for her, he motioned for her to exit. "Sayonara, sweet cakes." He slapped her butt as she walked out, then slammed the door.

The helicopter flew above the freighter, high tailing it down the straight, towards the ocean. "What's our plan Bo?" John yelled into the headset.

Bo shrugged back, loading his gun. "Shoot anything that moves?"

John nodded thoughtfully. "Sounds like a good plan."

"I'll take her down as far as I can, but you're going to have to drop the last couple of feet." The pilot shouted to the threesome. "After that, it's up to you how you get out. I'll have the Coast Guard send out a boat when you go."

Bo motioned for the pilot to take the helicopter down. The men readied themselves for the sharp drop they were about to make. Bo went first. He jumped out, and more or less landed on his feet. The other two followed in similar suit. The harsh ringing of a machine gun made them run for cover. The helicopter swerved violently then tapered off for land's direction.

The three crouched behind an oil container, occasionally firing their handguns in the machine gun's direction. John fired three shots, and the machine gun stopped firing. He motioned for Bo and Roman to get

inside the boat.

For a second, Hope could have sworn that she heard gunfire on top. She listened hard, but the noise had stopped. She was slumped against the bedside table, wool blanket wrapped around her. She brushed the hair out of her face, then rested her head against her hand.

She heard the noise again. Hope jumped to her feet. This time she was sure that it was indeed gun shots. She ran to the cell door, straining to hear where exactly it was coming from. The other cellmates were also looking groggily about them, hearing the same noise as Hope.

"Bo!!!" Hope screamed. She hopped on her feet up and down, shouting his name over and over. It was him; it had to be him.

"Mom?" Hope ran towards Shawn D. He was sitting up in bed, dazedly staring at his mother jumping around.

Hope hugged him tightly. "We're being rescued. Can you walk? We might have to make a run for it."

Shawn stared at her, still trying to understand what she was telling him. Walk, he thought he knew that word. Slowly, he swung the covers off his body, and attempted to get out of bed. Hope held him by the shoulders, guiding him up to a standing position. She suddenly realized how much taller he was than she.

A guard burst down through the corridor, gun firing blindly in front of him. Hope and Shawn made a dive for the floor, covering their heads. More sets of shots rang out, and the guard slowly fell to the ground. Hope and Shawn carefully lifted their heads. A man in a dark leather jacket cautiously walked down the corridor.

Hope jumped up. "Bo!" She screamed.

Bo came running for her. They kissed each other frantically through the bars. Bo stopped, and looked at the lock. "I don't have a key," then he looked down at his gun. "Stand back."

Hope grabbed Shawn and the two ran to the other side of the cell. Bo fired at the lock twice, then kicked the door open. He ran inside, clutching Hope's face and kissing her over and over again. Hope squeezed him tight; smiling like there was no tomorrow. Bo turned towards Shawn, hugging him tightly.

Bo stepped back, holding Shawn's head in his hands, staring at him. "Are you two alright?"

"Shawn's got a horrible fever. We should get him to a hospital."

Bo nodded, then hugged both of them again. "Sorry I took so long guys."

Kate slept with a smile on her face. The silk pillow and silk sheets gently caressed her naked body. She assumed that this is what bliss truly is. She turned over, to feel Nicholas sleeping beside her. But he wasn't there. Kate patted the pillow a few more times, to make sure that she wasn't imagining things. She reached for the table lamp.

And let out a blood-curdling scream.

The side of the bed where Nicholas should have been was covered with blood. She looked at her hands and screamed again. There was blood all over her hands as well. She began to shake, calling out Nicholas's name, but getting no response. She stood up, and cried out when something sharp pierced her foot. There lying on the floor was an eight-inch knife, covered to the hilt with blood. Kate picked up the knife.

The door burst open, Kate screamed. Men with guns stood in the darkened doorway. Kate held out the knife, about to protect her from anything these men might try.

"Police, put down your weapon!"

Kate began to cry as she suddenly realized that she had been set up. But where was Nicholas?

Hope slept for the first time in what felt like ages, her head resting in Bo's lap. His head was slumped up against the wall, his mouth open in a snoring mode. Julie chuckled at the sight of the two. The whole family was in the hospital, having both Hope and Shawn checked out. Hope was fine, somewhat malnourished and dehydrated, but mostly exhausted. Shawn was placed in observation for the night, or until his fever broke.

Doug placed a blanket over the sleeping couple. "They make quite the pair, don't they?"

Julie nodded.

"They got no luck whatsoever, but they still make a cute couple." Julie laughed out loud at Doug's last comment.

Belle stared at the sleeping figure of Shawn. He looked terrible, but there was still something to him that she just couldn't put her finger on. She sat in the chair beside his bed, content to watch him sleep peacefully. She barely slept the whole time he was missing. She couldn't deny that he meant something to her, something very special.

A yawn reminded her that she needed sleep too. As she stood to leave, she stopped, and thoughtfully gazed down at this young man who seemed to have some weird power over her emotions. Without thinking, she leaned down and kissed him on his forehead. "Just hurry up and get better." She whispered into his ear.

Outside the room, Marlena smiled to herself.

Victor watched the morning news with a grim look on his face. There was a scene of her being whisked away in the police car; blood caked on her face and hands. She was crying miserably, begging for someone to listen to her pleas of innocence.

"And to think it was all for you." Victor glared at the young man tied up behind him. Nicholas mumbled under his gag, eyes imploring Victor's mercy. "All this misery, just for you. I hope you're happy now."

Victor left the dungeon room, locking the door behind him, but leaving the t.v. on, so Nicholas might watch his lover being handcuffed before his eyes.

THE END

End
file.